

THE RIVAL BRIDALS.

by S. D. ANDERSON.

“So Ellen Lester is going to marry young Davis,” said Clara Elton, to her friend Constance Seldon, as they seated themselves in the parlor after a morning walk, “well, I am surprised; I thought she had more spirit than to marry him.”

“Why, who is this Mr. Davis?” asked her friend, “is he a stranger in the place, and what is the objection?”

“A stranger, oh, no,” said Clara, laughingly, “he is no stranger, at least to me, nor Ellen neither, and that is the most surprising part of the affair, he is old Davis, the baker’s son—would you believe it of Ellen Lester?”

“But I see no objection to him on that account,” said Constance, seriously, “but tell me what occupation does he follow?”

“Why, he is studying law to be sure, that is the fashion now. Every man must study law, especially among the mechanical classes. The family was content to pursue the business of his father; but some of his friends persuaded him that he had talents, and that he must study, so he gave up the bakery and took to the office. We shall soon have nothing but persons of that description at the bar.”

“Well, if they possess talents of the right kind, I can see no harm that can result from their pursuing this profession,” replied Constance, “indeed I think it rather a merit to surmount the obstacles of birth and fortune, and carve out your own elevation in the higher walks of the sciences. Would you shut out from the humble citizen all hopes of promotion in life?”

“By no means,” said Clara, as she played with her ten dollar French fan, a present from Count Trejaney, “but then there must be mechanics, and why not be satisfied in that sphere, and not wish to soar above their proper place—besides they cannot expect those, who have been born and educated in a different rank of society, to associate with them. Much as we may talk of equality of birth, we cannot disguise the fact, as in the face of nature there are

inequalities, so it will be in the social world. There always has been and always will be different grades—the high and the low—the rich and the poor—the gifted and the humble—these are the barriers through which you would break, and force all to a level—trust me, dear Constance, 'tis all a dream.”

“But a dream that must be realized, Clara. Mental superiority will find its way to the front rank, whether seen in the rich or the poor. This is the equality that I trust to, and this is strikingly the case in a country like ours, where the means of cultivating those gifts are put within the reach of all classes; and here too the incentives to action are to all alike, each will strive for the prize because it may be obtained by each. Men are valued here, Clara, or ought to be, in proportion as they display those qualities most needed in society—and what so needed as an understanding of the principles and laws that are the real foundation of a nation’s liberties? But we are getting away from the subject—young Davis has talent, has he not?”

“It is said so. I have not met him since Ellen left us to reside with her aunt. You know that, at the death of her mother, she came into possession of some property, and as her aunt was poor she went to reside with her, that she might the more readily aid her without the appearance of charity. Whilst she resided with us, we all discountenanced the match so much that he did not visit us often; but since Ellen has resided with her aunt he has been quite attentive, and I heard this morning they are to be married as soon as he has been admitted to the bar. But I have other news to tell you, Count Trejaney has accepted an invitation, and will be here tonight. He is so engaging, and then so rich, quite the rage in society.”

“How long have you been acquainted with this Count?” asked Constance.

“I was introduced to him at Mrs. Madden’s last party,” said Clara, “and he paid quite particular attention to me during the evening; and then he talked so interestingly about his travels—you will be delighted with him, Constance.”

“And this is all you know about him,” said Constance, “and with this slight acquaintance you invite him to a private circle of friends. Why this is more than you would think of extending to some of your earliest acquaintances.”

“Ah! but then consider the circle in which he moves. The first in the city. They would not admit him if he was not quite the man of honor, besides we must pay some respect to the custom of the country from which the Count comes. v The Count says that there a person’s rank, and not his long acquaintance, is his

passport to good society.”

“And so it would be here if that rank conferred on its possessor more than the mere title,” answered Constance, “but our country has been flooded with vain pretenders to the honor, if honor it be, to have the Count attached to a name, that, but for that fortunate appendage, would not rise above the mists of their own ignorance. If I was a man I would prefer the humblest rank in a land, where all must or may be useful, to a thousand titles conferred as the meed of inglorious deeds.”

“But the Count’s cause must suffer in my hands,” said Clara, while a slight blush covered her cheek, “and I will leave the defence to him. Come, shall we practice the new song?” and taking her friend’s hand, she assumed her seat at the piano, and commenced humming the melody, whilst her friend, selecting a book from the table, sank into silence.

Clara Elton was a spoiled child of fortune. Her parents were wealthy and worldly. With them the two great principles were riches and rank, and they could not separate the idea of respectability from a man who kept an account in a bank, and had a carriage and farm. To them the doctrine that “wealth makes the man,” though very good on paper, was not so good in practice; and however sweet a period it makes in the abstract, in real life it was a stumbling block. Mr. Elton had risen from almost the lowest grade, to his present high station in the business world, but, once having got there, he did as people usually do—he despised the means that enabled him to arrive at the honor. Mrs. Elton was a woman, and loved her husband, and as a matter of course he was the focus of all her knowledge. If Mr. Elton had said the banks had ruined the country, every thing evil from the ruin of a community to the burning of a church, would be attributed to that source. If Mr. Elton said that Mr. So and So was not respectable, he could not have been admitted to the house. But Mr. Elton never did say that a rich man was not respectable, and consequently that was the open sesame to the hearts and doors of this worthy couple.

Clara Elton presented what at this age of the world is not an uncommon character among this class of females—a being right in feelings but wrong in principles. To all the calls of charity she was ever ready. No one could accuse her of stepping in the least from the paths of duty, be that what it may. This was the result of untaught native feelings; and thus far she was right, thus far the stream of the affections had not been turned out of the right channel by a false system of education, but she had been taught to revere and look up to wealth as the basis of all that was true and good in principles and actions. This was

the fault. From her father she had caught all her contempt for the useful classes, and the tendency to cringe to any thing that partook of the show and glitter of wealth, without an attempt to strip off the guise and appreciate, if possible, the real character of the individual. This trait in her character, moreover, had been strengthened by the members of the circle in which she usually moved. As wealth was the magnet of attraction with her parents—the means to secure a welcome reception to the dwelling of Clara Elton, all that visited there were either wealthy or made up the deficiency in the real article by a double portion of pretension. Being an heiress, and the daughter of one of the elite of the land, she lived in an atmosphere of flattery—a state of being where all the finer and better feelings of the human mind are overrun by the rank weeds of pride and arrogance. All bowed to the shrine of Clara Elton, and all, while they bowed, saw in the distance the golden visions of a father's wealth. Thus surrounded by the idlers of the season, and the hangers on of the latest French fashions, no marvel that she became haughty and vain in principle, and looked upon the different orders of society as far beneath the station of Clara Elton.

Among the early associates of Clara had been Ellen Lester. Mr. Lester was not so rich as his neighbor, still he had enough at his death to leave his widow in competency. Ellen had been the companion of Clara at school, and when she had been separated from that mother to enjoy the benefits of a superior system of instruction, she had accepted the proffered kindness of Clara to make her residence a home. At the death of her mother, Ellen became the possessor of property sufficient to meet all her most lavish wants, and in obedience to her mother's will she took up her residence with her maternal aunt in a different part of the city. In the characters of the friends there was a marked difference. Ellen had been taught to look upon society as it is, to judge of mankind by the plain rule of truth, and not by extraneous circumstances. This made her look deeply into the characters of the persons who constituted the circle into which she entered, and, in her estimate, she was seldom mistaken. Plain and unassuming in her manners, she was not dazzled or led astray by the display and assumption of little minds, or lured aside after the fleeting phantoms of fashions and extravagance. She had resided long enough with the Elton's fully to appreciate the first wish of the family—a splendid alliance for their daughter. To the attainment of this hope she had seen them bend all the energies of their minds, and often had her pure mind been shocked by their conduct. Step by step she saw Clara being drawn into the vortex of fashionable life, and inducted into the schemes of her family. In private she knew Clara to be the kindest of creatures, but the web of the tempter had been set, and the victim was now about to commence the struggle for life. It is the first step in our career that

decides our fate, and that had now been taken by Clara under the guidance of her father.

Among the early friends and companions of Ellen Lester was Edward Davis. His father was in comfortable circumstances, but still thought it necessary to instil into his son habits of industry. As a matter of course he was taught the business in which his father had acquired both character and competency. Whilst the father was anxious to train up his son in the paths of industry—he did not neglect his mind, and young Davis early in life displayed marks of talent and genius. In character he was frank and open, and free from deceit and treachery. He soon gained the confidence and love of all who knew him, and of none more than of Ellen Lester, who saw in him all that, in her opinion, constituted the great traits in the sum of a man's character—truth, honor, and fidelity—and thus their young hearts grew up together. Edward soon learned to associate her name with all that was pure and lovely in his estimate; while she watched over the rising fame of her young friend with all a woman's fondness. After he had completed his education, at the instance of his friends, he commenced the study of the law, and now but waited the completion of those studies to lead Ellen to the altar. He had told her all his hopes and wishes—his plans and prospects for the future—and she had blushing consented, and thus their happiness was complete. The busy tongue of report had given the news to the winds, and it was to this that the conversation at the commencement of this sketch alluded.

Evening came, and with it the private circle at Mr. Elton's, to which Clara had pressed Constance Seldon to stay. It was a brilliant affair. All that wealth could command and fancy suggest, ministered to the wants and wishes of the select few. Music and song and wit were there—beauty clad in rosy smiles, as if not dangerous enough without, glided through the mazy dance, light as the zephyr's breath upon the sleeping lake. A flood of light poured down upon the magic scene, giving to that gorgeous mansion the semblance of a fairy land. All was happiness, at least to the eye. Clara Elton was the star of the bright array. Richly dressed, she shone the gayest of them all. About her was gathered a crowd of admirers, all bowing to the shrine of the regal beauty. And she was the life of all. To one a smile, to another a word, here a bow, and there a witty remark—kept the small circle in spirits. But to none did she bend her eyes so often as to the Count Trejaney. Many a bright glance beamed from her speaking eyes in answer to the compliments that fell from his lips, and deeper to the soul went the thrill of that voice when he spoke of beauty and admiration. Clara was called on to sing, and she complied, and the Count stood by the chair, and the touch of the player trembled, and the music ended, she accepted

the arm of the Count, and together they sought the garden. The summer air was bland and fragrant, the breath of sleeping flowers stole over the senses, the strains of the distant melody floated by, the calm stars looked down upon this Eden with a smile, and then the Count talked of love, and Clara listened, and when she left the spot it was as the affianced bride of Count Trejaney. And now the time of departure had come, the greetings were said and over, the gay voices hushed and still, the bright lights dim and gone, and silence reigned over what late was all life and excitement. And Clara had gone to her chamber, but not to rest. The excitement of the past hour had waked up within her breast a tide of emotions, that would banish sleep from her pillow. She had taken the final step. The last act of the drama was drawing to a close, and yet she was not happy. The sudden proposal from the Count—and her acceptance of that proposal, after so brief an acquaintance—the language of Constance—and the undefined dread of the consequences, all spoke to her in this still hour; but then the riches and rank of the Count—the difference in the customs and manners of the people of different lands—and more than all, the known admiration which her father had for what he termed splendid matches, made up the bright side of the picture. In this whirl of contending emotions, she fell asleep, and, in her dreams, she still thought of wealth, rank and pomp. As might be expected from the character of Clara's father, the proposal was accepted; and r amid the magnificence and pageantry of wealth and circumstances, Clara Elton became a bride. The Count signified his intentions of remaining for some time in the country, and a mansion, corresponding with the pretensions of the parties, was taken for their future residence.

On the same day that witnessed the nuptials of the Count—Edward Davis—having completed his course of studies and been admitted—led to the altar his long loved Ellen. With them the time was not one of excitement. All was hushed and still, save the beating of their hearts, that spoke almost audibly the completion of their joy. After the lapse of a few days they took possession of a small, but neat mansion, the property of Edward's father—and Ellen prevailed on her aunt to accept a home with her, and thus we leave them. May your stream of life, young couple, be never dimmed. You have chosen the wiser part, you have culled the roses in the spring, may the frosts of winter wither them not.

Ten year had passed away. But many a change has came upon that scene since last we trod the path together. Many a dream has vanished—many a hope has been tested—many a wish has been disappointed— many a bright vision faded in the bud; but still the wheels of time press on, regardless of what they crush.

In one of the many apartments of a splendid mansion in our city, were seated two females. The room bespoke the standing of the occupants, and told of ease and comfort. Much that revealed the pursuits of the owners could be seen in that apartment. Books and music were laid upon the table, a piano occupied its place amid the arrangement, on the walls were hung several pictures from the old masters, and others of a more modern nature, though scarcely inferior in point of merit. It was evening, and the lamps had been lit and the curtains drawn. The fire burned brightly in the grate. Without, the wind was howling and whistling through the streets in wild and woful fury. The snow, that had fallen during the day, now lay white and dreary in uneven ridges in the deserted streets, or was caught up by the blasts and whirled in clouds against the persons of the benighted and houseless wanderer.

Seated at a table in that room were the two friends Ellen Lester and Clara Elton, though each now bore a different name; and in the appearance of the two there was a marked and perceptible difference. Both were still beautiful, but in the subdued and melancholy expression that would steal over the features of Clara could be read a tale of suffering, well calculated to fade the rose from the cheek, and the fire from the eye of beauty. Yet still traces of her former loveliness lingered, "like the beams of the parting day." She was clad in a robe of plain black, a color well fitted to her pale and chastened features. From the page on which she was reading, she would occasionally raise her eyes and fix them upon the face of Ellen, who, engaged in some of the many occupations of a mother, sat opposite to her; and in that glance what volumes of the feelings and thoughts of the woman were told. Ellen Davis presented a different picture. In her sweet face, slightly touched by the hand of time, were to be seen hope and joy fulfilled, a youth not spent in dreams for the unattainable, nor a womanhood consumed in longings for all the visionary romance of a girl's desires. She was a wife and mother, and as she bent her gaze upon her child, sleeping by her side, tears would roll up into her eyes; but how different from these that filled those of her friend. Both were silent. Clara's thoughts were with the past—she was again a girl, innocent and happy, at home amid the flowers and joys of youth and the friends that she loved, before the world with its chilling blasts nipped all the warmer and holier feelings of the young affections, and gave her in return a blighted and withered existence. And Ellen was in the present, calm and contented, blest with the love of a husband, who cherished in each expiring year all the depth and intensity of his young aspirations—surrounded with the love of her children—conscious of being the means of cheering the drooping spirits of one to whom through every vicissitude she still

clung to with a wife's deep love. No wonder that, on her beaming countenance, no traces of sorrow could be seen. But as the hours flew by, and still no familiar knock was heard, (and all day had that husband been absent) impatience began to be manifest in the eager listening for each noise, and the frequent risings to catch, even through the gloom, a glimpse of the husband and hither. But the anxiety was soon rewarded, as, flushed with the attainment of a cause in which more than ordinary ability had been engaged, Edward Davis entered the room. And now he recounted the labors of the day, and in his glowing and forcible manner gave to his listeners a brief and simple account of the few past hours. Then the toils of the office forgotten, he took up a volume of *He mans*, and, in the best tones of a rich and manly voice, read aloud. This poetry of Home, this copy of the affections, and what a family circle was gathered there! When the time of rest came, each retired with the love of peace resting upon the household altar, and among the many prayers that ascended from the shrine of Faith to the throne of Love that night; none was more pure or sincere than that of Clara Elton for the happiness of Ellen Davis.

Kind reader! one more move on the table of the past and we are done. As stated in the preceding part of this tale, after the nuptials of Clara Elton and the Count Trejaney, they began life on the most magnificent scale. All that wealth could lay upon the altar of fancy was procured. Ball followed ball, and parties succeeded each other in rapid succession. All was glare and show, fashion and extravagance; and the beautiful wife of the Count was every where the theme of admiration and envy. Thus passed a year. But at the end of that time, Clara saw a visible change in the manner and appearance of that husband, and in his habits came also a change. Home to him was no longer a source of attraction; he was often absent all night. To the remonstrance of his wife he at first presented an evasive answer, but now came the harsh look and the cutting reply. Under the pretence of delayed remittances, he procured large sums of money from the father of Clara to be expended secretly in gambling. Clara bore up against the tide of coming misfortunes with a woman's strength and resolution. She saw one after another of her long crushed dreams fade, away, and bitterly did she repent the wrong impressions of men and things that she had entertained in early life. She saw now the true standard of worth, but alas! too late. For so me time' after the marriage, her family gave themselves up to vain and delusive dreams of the alliance, but as the requests for means to keep up the course of living in which the Count indulged became more frequent and pressing, doubts would suggest themselves to the mind of the worldly man, and these were every day strengthened by the reports that began to be circulated as to Trejaney's pretension to the title of Count. More than one boldly hinted that he was a foreign adventurer, in quest of money; and this became the

settled belief of many. At this crisis of affairs came the derangement of the business matters of our country, and as Mr. Elton was deeply engaged in the moneyed institutions, he of course was a heavy sufferer. Whilst he was writhing under the losses that must reduce him to absolute dependence, the Count still continued to solicit large sums of money. Seeing that there was now no possibility of concealment, Mr. Elton gave up his effects, and retired to a small residence some distance from the city, the property of a friend. This was a severe blow to poor Clara. But a still heavier one awaited her. She was accustomed to the protracted visits of her husband to other cities; but he had now been absent still longer than usual, when she received a letter from him, that was a death blow to all her hopes. The letter said that he had left the country, and indulged in all the meanness of a little mind. It confirmed all the worst suspicions of her friends, and he was indeed a foreign adventurer. He taunted her with this, and gave, as his reasons for his departure, her father's inability to supply him in his demands for money. All this was told, and to his wife. And this was the consummation of all Clara's hopes! Her spirits became prostrated under this awful affliction. Hastily disposing of the property still remaining, she joined her parents. To them the blow was a severe one, and reflection did not lighten the burden. Had they not by their attachment, only to these who had the appearance of wealth, so tutored the mind of that daughter as to lead her to a mistaken judgment in this important matter? This reflection was the bitterest draught of all. Her mother did not long survive the desertion. Of a naturally weak constitution, she fell a victim to the most fatal of all complaints, because the least understood, a broken heart. Still Clara labored to cheer the declining years of her remaining parent, but to no purpose. He too fell beneath the crush of all his hopes, and she was left alone. It was now that Ellen Davis heard of her misfortune, and, through the kind and delicate attentions of her gentle spirit, and the more than brotherly care of her husband, Clara regained a portion of her spirits, and became an inmate and friend of their family. Here she still resides, joining with a hushed and noiseless tread in all the tender sympathies that makes woman, in the hour of trouble, a ministering angel.

Edward Davis is still rising in his profession, taking his place amid the wisest and best of the land. He has twice represented his native state in the councils of the nation, and exhibited there genius and purity, rare combination in these days of political degeneration! And Ellen! she still is the idol of her husband and the best of women. With him she has fought, and with him she wears the laurels, in the pride of a wife for the honor of a husband.

And Constance Selden what shall I say of you? Years have been added to thy

brow, but not to thy feeling. They still are fresh and green. The wings of thy sympathies are still over the children of want and suffering, as they were in the days of the past. Many a prayer from the abode of the poor and needy is sent up for thy happiness. Eyes beam brighter as they recognise thy lightsome step. Hearts beat with hope that before were sunk in sorrow at the mention of thy name. God's benison be on thee, gentle lady! Mayst thou have the best of all earthly rewards, the knowledge of a well spent life.



THE LADY'S WORLD OF FASHION. 1842.